



# Strengthening Career and Technical Education for Every Student

The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) provides foundational support to states and local entities to equip American workers with the skills needed for success in today's workforce and to ensure business and industry can compete in the international economy. As one of the largest federal investments in our nation's high schools, and a critically important resource for community and technical colleges across the country, the Perkins Act's Basic State Grant program builds the capacity of these institutions to offer high-quality, rigorous Career and Technical Education (CTE) coursework aligned to American labor market needs.

The Perkins state grant funds are distributed to each of the states and territories that, in turn, allocate funds to local school districts and postsecondary institutions. States may reserve a portion of their allocations, but at least 85 percent of a state's Perkins funds must be distributed to local programs using a needs-based formula. State and local recipients can utilize flexible Basic State Grant funds to improve CTE programs through activities such as connecting secondary and postsecondary education through programs of study, strengthening the integration of academics and CTE content in the classroom, expanding work-based learning experiences, offering career guidance and academic counseling services, ensuring that CTE classrooms have the latest technology and equipment, and providing professional development and technical assistance for CTE educators.

Since 2006, the last time the Perkins Act was reauthorized, key advancements have been made toward building the capacity of secondary and postsecondary educational institutions to prepare all students for success in current and emerging in-demand career pathways. At its core, CTE is about ensuring the United States leads in the global economy—meeting the needs of both individuals and employers. The attention on CTE is growing, and student performance as a result of CTE participation or concentration has been positive. It is critical that the reauthorized Perkins Act reinforces successes and makes thoughtful changes, informed by practitioners, to enhance progress.

In June 2016, a bipartisan group of lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives introduced the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (H.R. 5587), legislation that would reauthorize the Perkins Act. The bill was overwhelmingly approved by the full body by a margin of 405-5 and the Senate has continued working toward a Perkins reauthorization bill of its own. Through the reauthorization of the Perkins Act, the Trump Administration will have an important role to play in shaping CTE policy for years to come and we encourage you to look to these efforts as that process takes shape.

## **Ensure Access to High-Quality CTE Programs of Study**

We believe the foundation of your Administration's Perkins reauthorization priorities should be a commitment to ensuring equitable access to high-quality CTE programs that meet the need of students and the economy alike. The cornerstone of the most recent reauthorization of the Perkins Act was the introduction of CTE programs of study. Designed to facilitate the transition from secondary to postsecondary education through a non-duplicative sequence of courses that culminate in an education or work-based credential, programs of study promote the integration of rigorous academic and CTE content in order to create clear pathways to further education and careers. Programs of study have contributed to greater program quality by encouraging

Perkins-funded CTE to meet a more rigorous delivery framework. Included in H.R. 5587 is a formal definition for CTE programs of study that builds on existing law and practice, incorporating challenging academic standards, academic and technical knowledge, employability skills, and multiple entry and exit points for students, and culminating in the attainment of a recognized postsecondary credential.

*ACTION NEEDED: Support legislative efforts that make programs of study a central component in the next reauthorization of the Perkins Act, while maintaining other safeguards to ensure all students have access to a high-quality CTE program.*

In addition, there are key elements that help to ensure the highest-quality implementation of programs of study and ensure positive student outcomes.

Among these key program quality elements is a strong focus on partnerships between CTE programs and the business community. Such partnerships benefit employers by developing pipelines of qualified workers, while providing students the chance to develop in-demand skills that lead to careers that offer a self-sustaining wage and opportunities for advancement. Perkins should emphasize employer input into CTE program of study development and implementation, including identifying relevant standards, industry-recognized credentials, and the current technology and equipment used by the modern workplace. A reauthorized Perkins should also encourage grant recipients to work with business partners to identify and develop opportunities for work-based learning.

To better connect students with pathways to future career success, local Perkins recipients should be allowed to use funds to support career exploration coursework and career development activities both before and during student participation in CTE programs of study. Perkins funds, combined with other resources, should help to ensure students have access to the information and supports they need to understand the world of career possibilities, and explore and align their interests and talents with the full range of postsecondary education and career opportunities, leading to a fulfilling career and life.

Additionally, all CTE educators should have opportunities to continually update and expand their content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Encouraging and supporting sustained, intensive and collaborative professional development for teachers, administrators, guidance and career development professionals, and specialized instructional support personnel is essential to offering high-quality, relevant and current CTE programs. The Administration should also highlight other high-quality program elements such as career and technical student organizations, academic and CTE integration, opportunities for work-based learning, integrated student supports, and technical skill assessments.

*ACTION NEEDED: Support Congress' efforts to include key quality elements in the next Perkins Act, especially an emphasis on CTE programs of study, and other components of effective implementation, such as employer engagement, career development, and teacher professional development.*

### **Streamline the Planning Process and Encourage Alignment to Other Federal Programs**

The Perkins Act would benefit from increased efficiencies and a more streamlined approach to reduce the burden on states and local educational institutions. At the state and local level, the current required and permissive uses of funds should be restructured to center on planning and carrying out the specific components necessary to support high-quality implementation of CTE programs as previously mentioned. We are glad to offer specific legislative recommendations to accomplish this goal.

State and local plan requirements and uses of funds within the Perkins Act should be clearer, more exact and fewer in number in order to reduce administrative burden and draw into sharper focus Perkins' core mission of

supporting high-quality CTE programs. H.R. 5587 incorporates these principles, reducing administrative and programmatic burdens, while engaging a more direct link between planning, spending and program results via an annual assessment of program needs.

The Perkins Act is uniquely positioned among federal programs—connecting to both the secondary and postsecondary education systems, as well as to workforce and economic development initiatives. As such, great care should be taken to appropriately align provisions in the Perkins Act to the other federal education and workforce development programs, including the Every Student Succeeds Act, Higher Education Act and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, in order to reduce duplication, streamline implementation efforts, and ensure coordination. This alignment should be extended to the Perkins accountability system by utilizing data that is already available or that can be easily incorporated into state longitudinal data systems to minimize the burden on states and educational institutions.

*ACTION NEEDED: Promote policies that streamline Perkins planning and other administrative requirements, as in H.R. 5587, to more effectively support high-quality CTE and to reduce the burden on states and local Perkins recipients and encourage innovation in program design and delivery.*

### **Increase Student Choice through Expanded Access**

All students should have the ability to choose a high-quality CTE program, regardless of their zip code, socioeconomic status, or designation as part of a special population. Using data and performance accountability to drive decisions that ensure access to high-quality CTE programs of study will be essential to achieving this goal and we therefore recommend that the data provisions in current law, such as the disaggregation of student subpopulations, is maintained in order to identify and address access and achievement gaps.

Perkins is and should remain primarily a formula grant, maintaining Basic State Grant federal-to-state and state-to-local formula structure, to support all CTE programs that are willing to make a commitment to pursuing high levels of quality and continuous program improvement. While partnerships among education providers, employers and other community stakeholders should be encouraged, a reauthorized Perkins should maintain individual local school districts and postsecondary institutions as the primary eligible recipients of state grant funds. These direct funding streams, along with maintaining current options for innovative funding models, such as consortia and the pooling of funds among local recipients, will provide the maximum flexibility for state and local implementation of high-quality CTE programs of study.

*ACTION NEEDED: Encourage Congress to maintain the overall structure of Perkins funding and data collection to ensure that high-quality CTE programs are within reach for all Americans.*

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*For more information related to this brief, please contact Steve Voytek, Government Relations Manager for Advance CTE, at [svoytek@careertech.org](mailto:svoytek@careertech.org), or Alisha Hyslop, Director of Public Policy for ACTE, at [ahyslop@acteonline.org](mailto:ahyslop@acteonline.org).*